



Leading a Mentally Healthy School through the COVID-19 Pandemic

5 Small Ways School Administrators Can Make a Big Difference

- 1. Take care of yourself so that you can take care of others:** During times of crisis, your leadership sets the tone for staff. In addition to managing communication between the board, staff, and families, your school staff rely on you to model a calm and caring approach so that they can feel reassured and confident about their work and role. Taking care of yourself during this demanding time will yield personal and professional benefits as you lead your school forward through the pandemic. You might want to review these [personal resiliency tips](#) – they apply to you too!
- 2. Work as a Team:** No one person or group can take sole responsibility for the COVID-19 response in your board or school. Staff teamwork and distributed leadership is essential. Leverage the trusting relationships you have built, and count on the professionalism and expertise of your staff and colleagues. Continue to nurture an atmosphere of mutual support built on optimism, trust, and proactivity. In terms of student mental health, there is a team around you who can help. Every school board has a mental health leader and superintendent with responsibility for mental health who is available to provide direction and support.
- 3. Acknowledge Staff Efforts:** These are difficult days and it is best to presume that everyone is trying their best. Some staff members may be carrying more than you know, with personal health or mental health concerns triggered by the anxiety of these uncertain times. Be affirming and let your staff know that their efforts matter and that you recognize that they are doing the best that they can. Clearly articulate board messages and updates about processes and decisions in a timely and open way with staff and families so that they know what to expect, and what is expected of them.
- 4. Prioritize Student Mental Health:** This is a vulnerable time when it comes to student mental health. There are increasing risks (e.g., heightened anxiety, isolation) and decreasing protective factors (e.g., routines, access to support). As school leaders, it is important to have a plan for supporting the mental health of students that works alongside the plan for academic learning, during the school closures and upon return to school. Recognizing the importance of student mental health through aligned plans and clear, caring messaging demonstrates your commitment to all students, and especially to those who may be experiencing mental health problems at this time.
- 5. Ask for Help:** You don't need to have all the answers in leading a mentally healthy school through the COVID-19 pandemic. Lean on your professional associations and reach out to trusted colleagues to hear perspectives that might inspire solutions to challenges. As questions or needs about student mental health arise, reach out to your board mental health leader, or school superintendent, or tap into resources and information on the School Mental Health Ontario [website](#) (and follow us @SMHO_SMSO). If you have questions about a specific student or protocol, please reach out to mental health staff, following your school and board processes.

No one has walked through the moments we are experiencing right now – the best way forward is together.